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To the Audience at the Kingsway Theatre.

A Personal Appeal from the Author of
John Bull's Other Island.

DEAR SIR OR MADAM,

It is your custom to receive my plays with the most generous and unrestrained applause. You sometimes compel the performers to pause at the end of every line until your laughter has quieted down. I am not ungrateful ; but may I ask you a few questions ?

Are you aware that you would get out of the Theatre half an hour earlier if you listened to the play in silence and did not applaud until the fall of the curtain ?

Do you really consider that a performance is improved by continual interruptions, however complimentary they may be to the actors and the author ?

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Do you not think that the naturalness of the representation must be destroyed, and therefore your own pleasure greatly diminished, when the audience insists on taking part in it by shouts of applause and laughter, and the actors have repeatedly to stop acting until the noise is over.

Have you considered that in all good plays tears and laughter lie very close together, and that it must be very distressing to an actress who is trying to keep her imagination fixed on pathetic emotions to hear bursts of laughter breaking out at something she is supposed to be unconscious of ?

Do you know that even when there is no such conflict of comic and tragic on the stage, the strain of performing is greatly increased if the performers have to attend to the audience as well as to their parts at the same time ?

Can you not imagine how a play which has been rehearsed to perfection in dead silence without an audience must be upset, disjointed, and spun out to a wearisome length by an audience which refuses to enjoy it silently ?

Have you noticed that if you laugh loudly and repeatedly for two hours, you get tired and cross, and are sorry next morning that you did not stay at home ?

Will you think me very ungrateful and unkind if I tell you that though you cannot possibly applaud my plays too much at each fall of the curtain to please me, yet the more applause there is during the performance the angrier I feel with you for spoiling your enjoyment and my own ?

Would you dream of stopping the performance of a piece of music to applaud every bar that happened to please you? and do you not know that an act of a play is intended, just like a piece of music, to be heard without interruption from beginning to end ?

Have you ever told your sons and daughters that little children should be seen and not heard ? And have you ever thought how nice theatrical performances would be, and how much sooner you would get away to supper, if parents in the theatre would follow the precepts they give to their children at home ?

Have you noticed that people look very nice when they smile or look pleased, but look shockingly ugly when they roar with laughter or shout excitedly or sob loudly ? Smiles make no noise.

Do you know that what pleases actors and authors most is not your applauding them but your coming to see the play again and again, and that if you tire yourselves out and spoil the play with interruptions you are very unlikely to come again ?

Do you know that my plays, as rehearsed, are just the right length : that is, quite as long as you can bear ; and that if you delay the performances by loud laughter you will make them half an hour too long ?

Can I persuade you to let the performance proceed in perfect silence just this once to see how you like it. The intervals will give you no less than five opportunities of expressing your approval or disapproval, as the case may be.

And finally, will you believe me to be acting sincerely in your own interests in this matter as

your faithful servant,

THE AUTHOR.